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*Testimony of*

**Ray Rossomando**

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*

**Education Committee**

**Re: H.B. #6431 "An Act Concerning the Minimum Budget  
Requirement"**

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Legislative Coordinator for the Connecticut Education Association, representing 40,000 teachers across the state.

We testify today on *HB6431 An Act Concerning the Minimum Budget Requirement*.

HB6431 establishes a minimum budget requirement (MBR) using a baseline of local budgeted appropriations, less certain cost reductions. It establishes this baseline for the FY2012 and each year thereafter.

The current MBR expires at the end of this fiscal year. CEA supports the reestablishment of an MBR that guarantees continued investment in our schools. Unfortunately, HB6431 does not accomplish this goal. Foremost is our concern that this proposal weakens the MBR at a time when ECS underfunding is in excess of \$700 million. This underfunding already compromises our schools' ability to meet the state's educational goals. Relaxing the MBR at a time when the state is underfunding its local education commitment would only serve to exacerbate the underfunding of our schools. In addition to this fundamental concern, CEA is opposed to the proposed legislation in its current form for the following reasons:

1. It establishes as a baseline budget the fiscal year ending 2009. Districts are currently in the fiscal year ending 2011. What has happened among districts during this 2-year span varies. For some districts, using the 2009 baseline may set a lower threshold than using 2011. For others, the reverse may be true. In the end, the educational interests of the state are best served by using a threshold that takes into account increasing costs of providing high-quality educational

services. CEA does not support a baseline that would diminish the obligation of school boards – and by corollary, municipalities, to adequately fund their schools.

2. It establishes a baseline budget that is fixed in time and fails to recognize inflationary costs. The proposed language cements the 2009 baseline in statute and makes it applicable indefinitely (for the *"fiscal year ending 2012, and each fiscal year thereafter"*).

We fully appreciate the work that Governor Malloy has done to propose a budget that does not cut Education Cost Sharing (ECS). However, as many know, flat funding does not keep pace with even modest increases in the costs of providing educational services. A flat MBR ignores this.

3. It reduces the MBR by an amount equal to any reduction in enrollment multiplied by \$3,000. But it does not adjust the MBR upward for growing enrollments. This is an inherent policy contradiction.
4. It reduces the MBR by the amount of any savings realized through cooperative arrangements. While cost efficiency is a laudable goal, we should reinvest savings into schools to restore services, resources, and staffing and to respond to costly federal and state mandates like Special Education, Response to Intervention, and other requirements and reforms.
5. It permits the MBR to be reduced for undefined efficiencies approved by the commissioner. In doing so, it provides no guarantees that efficiencies would be reinvested into education.

Over the past two-years, teachers in 81 districts have accepted salary freezes while digging deeper into their pockets to pay higher co-pays and an increasing share of rising insurance premiums (since 2005-06, premium shares for teacher groups has increased from 12.2% to 16.4% – this is in addition to rising premium costs). Many of these concessions were made by teachers specifically to prevent layoffs and help control rising costs during difficult times. The proposed language would undermine these goals by permitting the bottom to fall out of school budgets. Under the vague language of this proposal, the result could be more layoffs, larger packed classrooms, and ultimately fewer resources to achieve the educational goals of the state.

Lastly, while it is necessary to establish an MBR to implement the biennial budget, the construction of a minimum funding requirement should also be a topic integrated into discussions relating to the future of the ECS formula.

Thank you.